

## **Breese, My Hometown**

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All of us have read about small towns in America. I live in one in southern Illinois. It is home to about 4,000 people, three churches, four schools, and many other activities. But before this, squatters inhabited the area where the town now stands. They left during the War of 1812. In 1816, two men founded the settlement by way of a road and built their houses on it. The road was the Goshen Road, and the houses belonged to George Green and Joseph Johnson.

Soon after these two men settled Breese, many more settlers arrived and built a toll bridge across Shoal Creek, north of Breese. A few years later, these same settlers opened a post office and a store next to the toll bridge. In 1835, many German farmers from the east coast came to the area to make a living by farming. As the area increased in population and commerce, it was hit by a deadly malarial epidemic in 1849. Farmers began to build crosses as a form of prayer to God to stop the epidemic. By the time the epidemic had run its course, not only had many died, but many other people fled the area in fear. When the epidemic ended in 1850, the area began to grow again. However, growth was slow, until the completion of the Mississippi and Ohio Railroad in 1885, bringing many travelers into the area. Not long afterward, businesses began forming, and churches and schools were built, along with a water and electrical plant. A volunteer fire department was also created in 1885. But one thing was missing, a name. Many names were discussed, but one name stood out more than any other: Breese.

Sidney Breese was recognized at both the national and the state levels for his political wisdom. He was born in New York on July 15, 1800, but came to Kaskaskia in 1820, the state capital of Illinois, to study law in Jackson County. A few years later, he became the Assistant Secretary of State, and helped move the state archives to Vandalia, Illinois, the state capital. In 1845, after Sidney completed his work in Vandalia, he moved to a farmhouse just outside of Carlyle, Illinois, just eight miles from Breese. His house, still standing, is the home of the Clinton County Museum. Sidney Breese later became a United States Senator, Speaker of the Illinois House, and Chief Justice of Illinois. But Breese is mainly remembered for his work creating the Illinois Central Railroad. Breese, Illinois, officially became a town on January 19, 1905, and it was named in memory of the great Sidney Breese.

Henry Hummert was elected the city's first mayor. By this time the town included five schools, three churches, and most things that a prosperous town needed. As time progressed, Breese became more modern. In April 1937, Edward Meier opened the Excel Bottling Company. This company is still in business, making Ski soda, which cannot be found anywhere in the world except Clinton County, Illinois and neighboring towns. Many other new stores and business were established including Wally's Malt Shop, which Walter Knue opened in 1951. He is still in business today.

When visiting Breese, one will see a town with over 3,000 people and new subdivisions. There is also a lot of history in this small town of Breese. As the sign says it is a town "known for its friendliness". It is a wonderful place to live. [From "City of Breese," [www.Breese.org](http://www.Breese.org), (Jan. 15, 2003); Burtschi, Mary, *Vandalia*; James Schlueter, committee chairman, *Breese, Quasicentennial Celebration, 1856-1981*.]